

## VIDEO WORLD CLASSIC

Many young film-makers have started their career in low budget schlockers and quite a few of them have come unstuck when they've moved to Hollywood. Fortunately this has not been the case with the very talented Sam Raimi, who made his Tinseltown debut last year with *Darkman*, an ambitious, hallucinatory comic-book inspired epic, chock full of cinematic virtuosity. Available on video from CIC, it's a movie that every horror buff should have in their collection.

To refresh your memory, here's the plot. A pre-credits sequence establishes not the hero, but the movie's second-rate villain, Durant (Larry Drake). In a pitched gun battle, Durant and his truly scary henchmen wipe out a rival gang without breaking into a sweat, stopping only for Durant to indulge his ghoulish hobby of cutting the fingers off his enemies with a cigar guillotine.

After an introduction like that, the hero of the piece can't seem to be anything but dull, and unfortunately Peyton Westlake (Liam Neeson) seems duller than most. A peace-loving scientist, Westlake is working furiously on a formula for artificial skin, which he has managed to develop up to a fashion. The one drawback is that the stuff only lasts for 99 minutes and after that it melts into a bubbling goo!

During a power failure, however, Peyton discovers that the skin lasts a lot longer in the dark - a neat angle that gives immediate meaning to the film's title. Meanwhile, Peyton's girlfriend Julie (Frances McDormand), a lawyer working for a crooked developer named Strack (Colin Fries), stumbles across some papers showing her boss is involved in making illegal payoffs to corrupt city officials. He's also in league with the diabolical Durant, and plans to take over the city in the best tradition of comic book villains like 'The Joker.'

Failing to persuade Julie to hand over the incriminating memo, Strack sends Durant and his mob over to Peyton's laboratory to search for them. Though they don't find what they are looking for, they murder Peyton's assistant and bash, burn and blow up the poor scientist, leaving him for dead. In reality our hero escapes with a goodly quantity of artificial skin and is taken in by a strange doctor (the uncredited Jenny Agutter) and her assistants (including director John Landis).

Trying out a radical new therapy on her anonymous patient, the doctor severs Peyton's nerves to prevent pain messages reaching his brain. As an unfortunate side-effect, Peyton turns into a raving, adrenaline-pumped, superhuman schizophrenic - a comic-bookish anti-hero who makes Michael

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**After the success of his low budget classics *Evil Dead 1 & 2* director Sam Raimi got a chance to put his money, or rather a major studio's money, where his mouth is and came up with Comic book horror *Darkman*.**

**This month's Video World Classic should shed some light on the matter.**







Keaton's tormented Batman look like a regular guy. Recovering consciousness, Peyton slips out of the hospital and recreates his artificial skin lab in an abandoned factory. From there, he plots his revenge, with the aid of an assortment of 'masks' that allow him to infiltrate Durant's gang and hide his gruesome disfigurement from Julie.

Raimi's modern day updating of *The Phantom Of The Opera* is tricked out with

lots of wild camerawork and an over-the-top score from *Batman* composer Danny Elfman. Like any good comic book adventure, *Darkman* is visually riveting, offering larger-than-life villains, an intriguingly flawed hero and a tough, appealing heroine - all portrayed by terrific actors. And if you look carefully you'll spot Sam's old *Evil Dead* buddy Bruce Campbell in a telling cameo.

Though relatively low-budget (by

Hollywood standards), the film was a surprise success that made back its cost several times over. This would normally mean a sequel might be on the cards. But instead, Universal have decided to make *Darkman* into a television series, which will be coming our way in 1993. Raimi won't be involved though - he has been too busy filming the long-awaited *Evil Dead III: Army Of Darkness*, which is due out next month at UK cinemas.